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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that children watch an average of 25 hours of television per week, this booklet is designed to help parents redirect their children's television viewing to higher quality programs. Ten "tips" are provided to help parents guide their children's television (TV) viewing: (1) set your child's TV schedule; (2) get involved (in the child's viewing); (3) don't be concerned if children of differing ages will be watching at the same time, as they can help each other learn; (4) make public TV a "special friend" for children who are at home alone; (5) consult your child's teacher and other available resources; (6) use TV to spur an interest in reading; (7) use TV to promote writing; (8) help your child explore the world, on-screen and off; (9) help children see math as fun and practical; and (10) set your own pace for family involvement. A list of children's series available on public television is included. (EW)

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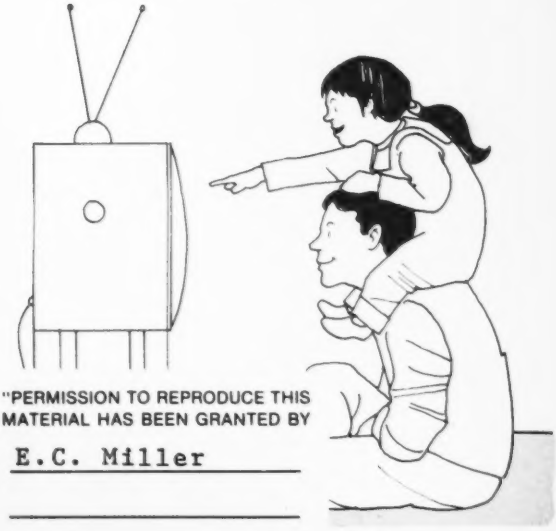
TV Tips for Parents

Using Television To Help Your Child Learn



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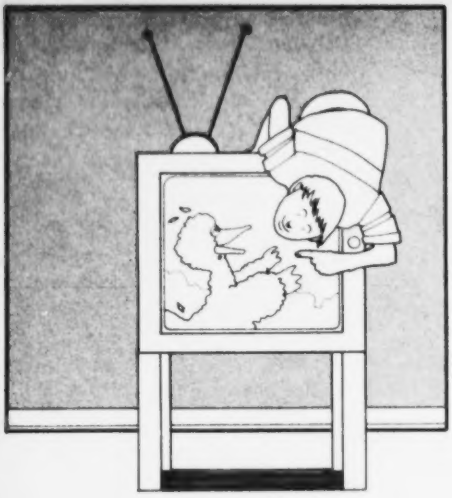


Your Child and Television

Children average 25 hours a week watching television. By the time they graduate from high school, they will have spent more time in front of the TV than in the classroom. Many parents and teachers rightly worry that excessive viewing is cutting into time that should be spent on homework and that youngsters are being exposed to too much sex, violence, mindless pap, and hard-sell advertising.

But turning off the television set is not the answer, since television *can* be an effective and exciting way to teach facts and concepts and stretch children's understanding and imagination. What you *can* do is redirect your children to high-quality, creative, and fun programs developed just for them—programs that are designed specifically to complement the lessons presented in the classroom.

Where are these programs? You can find them on your local public TV

station. Through extensive research and testing with thousands of youngsters and educators, the children's shows on public television have been proved to help children learn.

At the same time, these programs—such as *3-2-1 Contact, Sesame Street, Reading Rainbow,* and *Square One TV*—are lively and entertaining enough to keep children's attention. They also help children realize that school subjects really do tie in with the real world. The shows give youngsters a head start by familiarizing them with topics they will encounter in school and by reinforcing things they have already studied.

But you will have a lot to do with whether your children are exposed to the world of TV learning and how much they get out of it. You can turn TV watching into quality time for your child. In responding to a letter deploring the negative impact on television sex and violence on children, nationally syndicated columnist Ann Landers stated:

> "Surely you would agree that there is much on TV that is educational and worthwhile, especially on public broadcasting.
>
> "Parents, however, *can* do something positive to combat what you accurately describe as a danger. We can do more than serve as good examples. We can monitor our children's TV viewing. We can decide on Sunday what is to be watched during the week and how many hours will be spent in front of the tube."

A partnership between home and school is the key to ensuring that children get the most out of their

studies. But in today's busy world of single-parent and dual-job households, many parents have limited time with their children and are looking for ways to make that as productive as possible. The tips in this brochure are examples of simple, quick ways to guide your children to the best television has to offer and to use it to help them learn. (A list of children's series available nationally is provided at the end of the booklet. Many of these series are also closed captioned for the hearing-impaired.)

TIP ONE: Set Your Child's TV Schedule.

Because every local public TV station determines its own program line-up to suit local needs, check the newspaper TV listings for which children's shows are available and when they air. You can get more specific information about the content of programs from your local station's programming guide, which comes to you automatically when you join as a member.

With this information in hand, it takes only a few minutes a week to sit down with your children and plan the week's viewing. Choose programs that relate to your child's special interests, areas he or she is studying in school, or areas where extra help is needed. Just the give-and-take that goes on as you plan together which programs to watch can help increase communication.

If two or more children will be watching at the same time, take into consideration their differing needs and interests. This may require

selecting a mix of programs or making allowances for trade-offs when there are conflicting requests.

Don't expect 100 percent obedience to the schedule—children forget, or they're tempted to watch other shows they've heard about. It's better to provide guidance than to make iron-clad rules that cause resentment. And, once youngsters discover the high-quality, dynamic shows on public television, you'll find that the generation raised on *Sesame Street* will often be repeat viewers of other programs on their own accord.

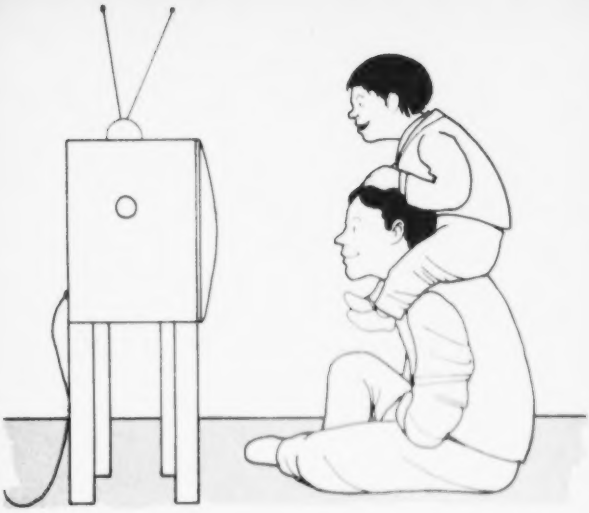
Finally, be sure to share the schedule with daycare personnel, sitters, or relatives if they will be caring for your children when the programs on the schedule are to air.

TIP TWO: Get Involved.

The ideal situation, of course, is for parents—at least initially—to watch programs with their children, talk about what they have seen, and help the youngsters relate it to their own lives. That's not possible in many situations, however.

But because you've planned the week's TV viewing together, you can still find opportunities to ask about the programs and your child's reaction to them. Questions stimulate children to really think about what they've seen and to become more critical, discriminating viewers.

In addition, your interest demonstrates how much you care about what your child is watching and



learning. This is especially important because research—including a 1986 report from CPB and the federal government's Center for Statistics—has found that by far the primary motivation for anyone—child or adult—to learn something new is the involvement of another family member.

The exchanges generated by these stimulating educational programs also work both ways. Younger children especially have a way of asking deceptively simple questions about what they've seen on television. If you don't know exactly why hot-air balloons stay up in the air or why grass is green, don't worry. It can be even more valuable for you and your child to find out together. You can ask the child to look up the answers to questions in the encyclopedia at school or the public library and report back to the whole family.

Most children like to be the center of attention, and there's nothing like being able to share a new bit of information with others to build a child's feeling of self-confidence. It's important for children to realize that

you believe they are capable of learning and that you genuinely look forward to what they have to say. This is important both at home and at school since countless studies have shown a direct relationship between adult expectations and children's performance.

So, for both educational and personal reasons, the time you spend making discoveries together is truly "quality time" for you and your child—or, as we in broadcasting might say, "prime time."

TIP THREE: Children Can Help Each Other Learn.

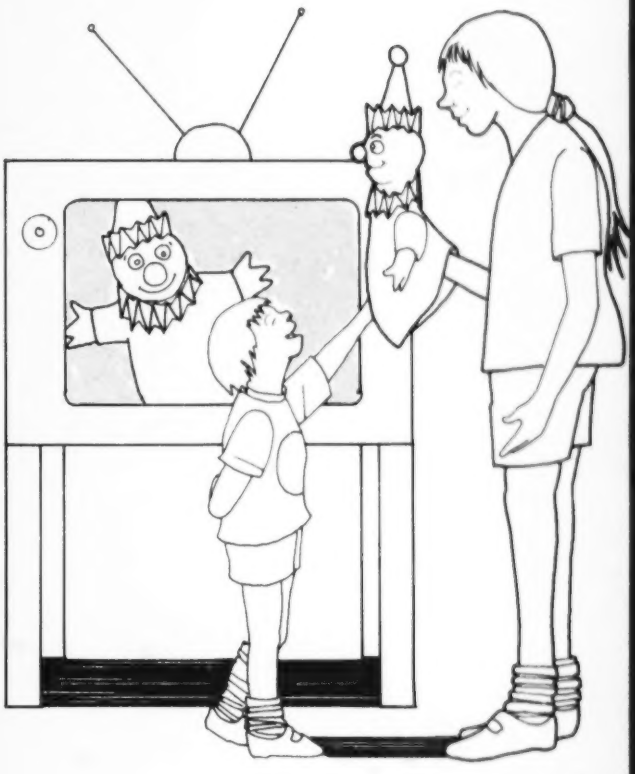
If children of differing ages will be watching at the same time, don't be concerned. The same public TV show can benefit all of them—in fact, having a mixed age group can be a plus.

There's a lot going on during the average 30-minute program—enough to feed different appetites. Younger children may appreciate a program using puppets because of the colors and movement, while older ones want to learn about how puppets are made. A program on flight might send one youngster off to make or fly a kite but lead an older child to work on model planes or aspire to become a pilot or astronaut.

Further, children absorb new information at differing rates and may also be ready for some types of information before they're prepared for others. So, while a public TV series may be geared toward, for example, eight- to 12-year-olds, that

doesn't mean that a child of six or 16 won't find aspects of the programs that spark his or her interest.

And children can be very good teachers for other children. They're less hesitant about asking each other questions they may feel sound silly to an adult. And the older ones get a kick out of explaining things to the younger ones. Children watching a program together also share their reactions and opinions, so that all may get more out of a program than if they had each watched it alone.



TIP FOUR: Make Public TV A 'Special Friend' for Children Home Alone.

Millions of children are home alone during out-of-school hours. American University professor Lynette Long, who has written extensively about "latchkey" children, puts the number of such youngsters at 10 million—with more than half completely alone, without even a brother or sister. The four basic problems for latchkey children, according to Long, are "paralyzing fear, loneliness, utter boredom, and stress."

For latchkey children, TV is a companion and a way to make the time pass more quickly. But violent or frightening shows can add to their distress, so it is doubly important to steer these children to other viewing. A planned schedule and follow-up activities can help structure empty hours. And public TV programs depict children learning and having fun with reassuring adults—in contrast to the villains who often appear in cartoons, reruns of adult shows, or movies on commercial channels.

While most of these children call a parent as soon as they get home, it can also be comforting if the parent leaves a note. Remind the child of

the time you'll arrive home, what's available for snacks, what show or shows you've agreed will be watched, and of how interested you will be to hear what the child thinks of them. You may also encourage the child to jot down reactions to the programs, draw a picture about them, or look up related information in the dictionary or a reference book.

Even such simple tasks can give a sense of purpose to a child's time alone, especially since the activities are in preparation for sharing something with you. Adults are sometimes not fully aware that even an hour alone can seem like a long time to a child.

And, keep in mind that if your child will be home alone on weekends, repeats of weekly public TV shows are often available on Saturday and Sunday. Further, CPB is currently supporting development of a block of children's programming designed for weekend morning viewing, so there will be a wider range of choice in the future.

TIP FIVE: Consult Your Child's Teacher and Available Resources.

A majority of schools use instructional television programs as part of their educational programs, and these sometimes include some of the same shows available to you at home. So you can not only ask your child's teacher for recommendations about public TV programs that would be especially helpful for your child but also request suggestions for activities and ways to build on what is learned from the programs. Based

on your child's level of development, these suggestions may involve things the child can do alone and then share with you or things you can do together.

There are also a number of publications developed by producers of public television shows that can help make what your child watches more meaningful. These publications include learning suggestions designed by educators and are directly related to the respective series. They are:

3-2-1 Contact Magazine
E=MC Square
P.O. Box 2932
Boulder, CO 80321

Mister Rogers' Plan and Play Book
Family Communications, Inc.
4802 Fifth Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Sesame Street Magazine
P.O. Box 52000
Boulder, CO 80321-2000

Reading Rainbow Gazette
648 Broadway
New York, NY 10003

In addition, several groups and organizations have designed home learning tips. The Home and School Institute, for example, has done extensive work in this area. Its publications include dozens of step-by-step prescriptions for learning that use the simplest of home resources and can be adapted to support TV learning. The institute is located at 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

The main thing is to get into the habit of noticing how everyday chores or activities can be used to reinforce learning. Public TV brings a universe into your living room, and you can add to what your child gets out of these programs by helping him or her understand how the information relates to daily life.

TIP SIX: Use TV To Spur an Interest in Reading.

Surveys have found that public television series such as *Reading Rainbow* increase both library borrowing and book sales. In addition, 95 percent of librarians surveyed about *Reading Rainbow* responded that the series stimulates children's interest in reading, and more than half attributed a dramatic increase in summer reading—which the series is designed to encourage—to children's having watched the programs.

Even programs not specifically geared to promoting reading can be used to interest children in reading to find out more about the topics or stories portrayed. For example, youthful viewers of *WonderWorks*, a prime-time anthology series, have flocked to libraries to find the novels

dramatized on the programs. Children, once enchanted by the characters on screen, want to know more about them.

WonderWorks also offers a good opportunity for family viewing since it is offered during evening hours. While geared to preteens, the series has been found to have wide adult appeal as well. It can set the stage for adult-child discussion of the emotional and social issues presented in the stories.

In addition, according to the International Reading Association, television programs can—because of the flood of images presented—help strengthen children's attention to detail, an important skill in reading. The shows can also help enlarge young viewers' vocabularies, and younger children are aided in word recognition by hearing words that are flashed on the screen at the same time, as on such series as *Sesame Street* and *3-2-1 Contact.*

Even science or nature programs such as *NOVA* and National Geographic specials can build curiosity that leads children to books—whether picture books about animals or more advanced volumes about exploration.

TIP SEVEN: Use TV To Promote Writing.

Some people think that television will be the death of writing, but you can actually use TV programs as a springboard to encourage your child's interest in writing. Point out a fact that your child may not have

seriously considered—that no show would ever get on TV without writers. You can also suggest that the child compose a description of the most interesting or unusual program he or she has seen that week or that the child write a scene extending or changing a televised story. Such activities help children organize their thoughts and write more clearly.

Older children can write reviews. We all enjoy being critics. And you can respond to criticisms about shows by challenging the youngster to come up with a better idea and script. You can even go on to act out your child's own masterpiece with the help of family members and neighborhood children. This type of activity gives real experience in composing and ordering ideas and may help reduce the tension of school writing projects.

Younger children can draw pictures portraying what they've seen on television and compose orally. They often especially enjoy tape recording their stories.

TIP EIGHT: Explore the World On-Screen and Off.

Television gives us a chance to visit exotic lands, see unusual creatures, investigate the solar system, see microscopic life up close, and dive to the ocean floor. In short, it provides the most fantastic scientific "field trips" most of us will ever take—and does so right in our homes. You can help tie what Keith Mielke, head researcher for Children's Television Workshop, calls the "eyes-on" experience of television to the hands-on experience of home and school.

For example, keep an atlas or globe near the TV so your child can get a better idea of the locations referred to on programs. Public TV's science series *3-2-1 Contact*, for instance, makes a point of showing on a map where segments were filmed and describing the geography of the location. This is a real boost for classroom studies, since many teachers lament that today's students have no notion where foregin countries are—and aren't much more knowledgeable about our own states.

You can help children appreciate the mapmaker's art by having them make maps of your neighborhood, featuring your home, nearby streets, and other landmarks.

And since so many scientific principles are evident in our daily lives, you can demonstrate many of them with no special equipment and minimal investment of time. For example, you can show the three states of matter—solid, liquid, and gas—by taking ice cubes, letting them melt, and then boiling the water to form steam. Or any time you run hot water over a stubborn jar lid, you can explain that this helps loosen the lid because metals expand when heated. Putting a stalk of celery in a jar of colored water shows how plants draw up moisture just as a child drinks with a straw.

TIP NINE: Help Children See Math as Fun and Practical.

The public TV series *Square One TV* is the only television series available in the home that tackles our youngsters' need for greater math literacy as the United States strives to compete in an increasingly technological world. It makes math more understandable by using parodies of such familiar TV staples as game and talk shows, variety programs, music videos, and a continuing police drama.

Square One TV adapts these entertainment techniques from commercial TV and rock videos in order to show that math doesn't have to be either scary or boring. And while it's designed for youngsters eight to 12 years old, it can help any school-age

child, as is indicated by a seven-year-old "Small World reporter" whose article appeared in the Arlington, Va., *Journal*. Discussing "math anxiety," second-grader Geoffrey Weber of Fairfax, Va., urged that "if you think there is no end to math anxiety, think again. A new television program, called *Square One*, is now on PBS. This program helps you develop a good attitude about math and teaches you math-solving skills."

You can build on what such a series teaches by taking a few minutes to explain how a checkbook is balanced, how to compare prices in advertisements or at the grocery store, or how you cut a birthday cake to come up with the right number of pieces for the party guests.

TIP TEN: Set Your Own Pace.

Encouraging children to watch educational public television programs and helping them get the most out of the programs shouldn't be a chore—not for you and not for your child. So don't make the child's viewing schedule too rigid, and don't feel that you have to be a full-time teacher. According to your own time schedule and your child's needs, decide on

a level of involvement that's best for *your* family.

This may be simply setting up the viewing schedule and asking your child to tell you about the programs from time to time. That's enough to open the door to public television's educational resources, because extensive research and testing has found that children *do* learn from these programs.

If you can find opportunities during household activities to point out how they relate to what children have seen on the television shows, that's a bonus. And if you can come up with special activities, such as those suggested by the child's teacher or found in the resource materials developed for some series, you'll find that both you and your child can have fun and learn. The best part is that this can happen in a normal home atmosphere, at your child's own pace, without the pressures of tests, grades, or peers. When children find out how easy and enjoyable learning with TV can be, with you to encourage them, this will help them transfer their interest to the classroom and improve their school performance as well.

CPB's goal in producing this booklet is to let you know about the quality programming available on public broadcasting so that you can use it to the best advantage to help your child learn, to discover the joy of learning, and to carry it to adulthood—a real advantage in a competitive, fast-changing world.

COMING TO YOU FROM PUBLIC BROADCASTING

Among children's series available nationally* on public television are:

• **Sesame Street, produced by Children's Television Workshop, is the home of Big Bird and other beloved characters who introduce children ages 2-6 to basic reading, math, and writing concepts as well as the social skills they will need in the transition from home to school.

• **Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, produced by Family Communications, Inc., is designed for young children, especially those ages 3-6. The shows provide gentle guidance to youngsters as they learn about themselves and the world.

• **Captain Kangaroo,** produced by Robert Keeshan Associates, is directed to preschoolers and the early primary grades. The shows are meant to be both fun and educational, including such lessons as the importance of telling the truth, the nature of friendship, and how to conquer childhood fears. The programs also include on-location segments designed to inspire children to actively pursue their interests and to nurture their curiosity.

• **Reading Rainbow, produced by the Great Plains Network; WNED, Buffalo; and Lancit Media, is designed for children in kindergarten through grade 3 to encourage them to continue reading during the summer when

beginning readers may lose their newly learned skills. However, it is also available throughout the year in many markets.

• **Ramona, produced by Lancit Media, presents the adventures of this character created by best-selling children's author Beverly Cleary in her *Beezus and Ramona* books. It is primarily directed to children ages 4-10.

• **3-2-1 Contact, produced by Children's Television Workshop, is aimed at 8- to 12-year-olds and works to improve children's observational skills, stimulate their interest in science, and promote science as a career. The series has weekly themes such as flight, the oceans, or the senses that are presented through live action, animation, and location segments.

• **Square One TV, produced by Children's Television Workshop, is intended to encourage children's interest in and enthusiasm for math and help them gain problemsolving skills. It is aimed at children ages 8-12.

• **Owl TV, produced by WNET, New York City; the Young Naturalist Foundation of Canada; and the Audubon Society, focuses on the natural and environmental sciences. It is aimed at children ages 6-12.

• **DeGrassi Junior High, produced by Taylor Productions and Playing with Time, Inc., Toronto, and presented on PBS by WGBH, Boston, is a drama

series exploring the lives of students at fictional DeGrassi Junior High School and painting a unique portrait of the joys and heartbreaks of growing up in the the 1980s.

• **WonderWorks, produced by the WonderWorks Consortium, is the only prime-time anthology series designed for children's and family viewing. The series includes fantasy, mystery, comedy, history, and computer animation.

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* Some public television series for children take a break in the summer. However, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) continues to provide four series to stations for summer airing: *Sesame Street, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, Reading Rainbow,* and *3-2-1 Contact.* In addition, individual stations may show reruns of various series.

** Those series marked with two asterisks have in the past received or are currently receiving CPB funding.

CPB is a private, nonprofit corporation that was authorized by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 to encourage and develop noncommercial radio and television services for the American people. Quality children's television programming for home and school has long been a top priority of CPB and public TV stations and makes up about a third of all public television air time.

In addition to funding creation and production of children's and other programming, CPB also indirectly funds many local programs through grants to public television and radio stations. And, by providing seed money, CPB stimulates contributions of many more dollars from corporations, foundations, state and local governments, colleges and universities, and individuals. *Sesame Street*, one of the first stars of public broadcasting for children, for example, is now so popular and well-established that it no longer requires CPB support but receives tremendous cooperative financial support from local stations nationwide.

Provided as a public service by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and your local public television station.

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1111 16TH ST., N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
(202) 955-5100